

## Quapaw Tribe panel accuses 3 officials of misuse of funds

by: CLIFTON ADCOCK World Staff Writer

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See the full grievance committee report

QUAPAW — A Quapaw Tribe committee is looking into allegations made in a report last weekend that casino and tribal government officials misused funds and tried to hamper an investigation.

Quapaw Chairman John Berrey, who is mentioned in the report, said the allegations are false.

The tribe's three-member Grievance Committee, acting on complaints by several members of the tribe, issued the report Saturday to the tribal Business Committee, some of whose members are also mentioned in the report.

The Quapaw Tribe owns the Downstream Casino Resort in far northeastern Oklahoma.

The report alleges that three Business Committee officers — Chairman Berrey, Vice Chairman Willis Matthews Jr. and Treasurer George McWatters Jr. — unjustifiably profited from their involvement in the Downstream Development Authority, the tribal business that manages the casino.

Berrey, who is up for re-election this year, said the allegations are either flat-out false or presented in a false light. He said they stemmed from tribal politics.

"None of the information in that report is based on fact," he said. "It's a political witch hunt. The report is filled with false accusations, and as time goes by, I'll prove my innocence as well as that of" Matthews and McWatters.

The report alleges that the three received excessive salaries, benefits and bonuses through their positions on the Development Authority, including \$344,000 in salaries and bonuses for Berrey over 16 months, in addition to his stipend as chairman.

The report also details alleged misuse of Development Authority credit cards for expenses including new suits, Super Bowl expenses, a trip for Berrey and his family to England and airfare for Matthews and his wife to attend the Kentucky Derby.

The report also alleges that Development Authority money was used for a \$225,000 donation to the University of Arkansas Razorback Foundation, more than \$47,000 in hotel and casino complimentary services for the three men, skybox leases at the University of Arkansas, luxury box seats at Tulsa's BOK Center and season tickets for Kansas City Chiefs football games, without evidence that they were used to promote the casino.

The report also alleges that the Business Committee tried to hinder the Grievance Committee's investigation by ordering gambling officials to limit cooperation, restricting the committee's access to documents and limiting its access to attorneys, accountants and other experts.

The Grievance Committee asks that Berrey call a session of the tribe's General Council — made up of all voting tribal members — to decide whether to retain Berrey, Matthews and McWatters on the Business Committee or elect successors to them until the tribal elections. The council also appoints the Grievance Committee.

Berrey said the chairman of the Grievance Committee had sent him a letter recanting the allegations and stating that he will not deliver the request for a General Council meeting. This means the report and request for a General Council meeting is void, he said.

The tribe's internal and external audits have never found wrongdoing, he said.

McWatters and Matthews could not be reached for comment.

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